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THE MONTHLY GULL BULLETIN

GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY INC.

Volume 35 Berkeley, California, December, 1953 Number 12

DUMBARTON POINT SALT MARSHES

Due to the fact that remaining salt marsh areas close to San Francisco Bay Region cities are now merely remnants of the former great expanse of such marshes and tide flats which encircled much of the Bay, great interest has been expressed in the numbers of birds which live in such habitats under less disturbed conditions. An initial attempt at a census of the birds using one of the largest remaining areas of salt marsh, that south and east of Dumbarton Point, one to two miles south of the east approach to Dumbarton Bridge, was made on October 10, 1953, by members Ken Schulz, Donald Defoe, and the author with additional help by John Kilfoil, Terry Smith, and Dave Parry of Explorer Post 56, Boy Scouts of America.

Through the courtesy of the Leslie Salt Company, owners of the property, a sketch was made from an aerial photo of the region and thus a more accurate figure for the area involved was obtained. Leslie Salt Company also arranged for us to have convenient access to one corner of the largest marsh area, which extends from just north of the San Francisco aqueducts southward for a quarter to one mile to tidal mud flats of the bay shore and in a NE-SW direction for one to one-and-one-half miles. The total area of the marsh is about 550 acres; that of the bordering mudflats exposed at low tide is estimated at about 250 acres.

The Southern Pacific Railroad and the aqueducts cross the marsh north of its middle; otherwise the marsh and tide flats are relatively undisturbed from their original condition. However, many of the birds present feed also in the salt evaporating ponds between the marsh and Dumbarton Bridge approach when the salinity is suitable. Our original intent was to walk the 1½-mile length of the railroad fill, which extends through the marsh, our arrival having been timed so as to be present at high tide in the belief that most of the birds would then be resting on the higher parts of the marsh adjacent to the railroad. However, the dike between the salt ponds and the marsh, as well as the roofed over aqueducts, held most of the loafing birds, so our plans were changed. A brief initial exploration of the main marsh area south of the railroad fill, involving walking on pickleweed mat and jumping or wading small, saltmarsh-grass-bordered channels, resulted in two Clapper Rails being sighted

and others heard. This type of marsh is just the kind which the rare Black Rail is known to inhabit, and perhaps it will some day be found here by persons who can search for it in the proper manner (as, for example, with a dog). At least 5 Marsh Hawks were foraging over the northwest part of the marsh.

We then made a count of the birds on or within sight of the dike along the north edge of the marsh, between it and the salt ponds, walking a total distance thereon of 1 1/3 miles and covering effectively an estimated 300 to 1000 feet (according to the size of the species) of salt ponds and intervening smaller dikes to the northward, as well as the 200-400 foot strip of salt marsh between the dike and the aqueducts. The birds tallied on this 1 1/3 miles were:

Pied-billed Grebe 1
White Pelican 600
Double-crested Cormorant 14
Great Blue Heron 4
Common Egret 12
Snowy Egret 24
Black-crowned Night Heron 71
Pintail 85
Turkey Vulture 2
Marsh Hawk 1
American Coot 5
* Killdeer 5
* Black-bellied Plover 57
* Long-bileld Curlew 7
* Hudsonian Curlew 5
* Willet 310
Greater Yellow-legs 1
* Least Sandpiper 2
(many more near KGO)
* Red-backed Sandpiper 16
* Dowitcher 40
* Western Sandpiper 8
* unidentified "peeps" 200
(many Westerns also at KGO)
* Marbled Godwit 1850
at least 2000 more were seen from railroad bridge at ebb tide, on about 30 acres of mud flat).
American Avocet 2
(est. 500 at KGO)
California Gull 3
Ring-billed Gull 11
unidentified Gulls 6
* Forster's Tern 5
Audubon's Warbler 1
(male, captured & banded)
Savannah Sparrow 4
Song Sparrow (Salt Marsh)..100 est.

A larger number of all of the species marked with an asterisk was encountered later, when we scanned the newly exposed mud flats along the Bayshore in late afternoon.

The most significant conclusion to be arrived at from our brief count is that we did *not* find the high-tide roosting place for most of the shorebirds, although the count of Marbled Godwits is very large for any one locality in central California. However, with at least 3500 Godwits in sight on the mud flats near the railroad bridge and with only a small part of the flats visible from that point, it is evident that a large population of this species as well as of the others have loafing grounds elsewhere than on the dike we covered.

It is hoped that qualified observers can revisit this area at some time in the future and, with more time available, better estimate the total shorebird population.

— Howard L. Cogswell

OCTOBER TRIP TO SHELL BEACH, POINT REYES, AND BOLINAS

On October 11, one of those perfect autumn days, 30 members and guests participated in the trip to coastal Marin County. The tide was high when we went along Tomales Bay and numbers of birds were rather small, at least as compared with mid-winter. We then visited the state park at Shell Beach, where a very interesting warbler was spotted, which after some controversy was identified as an immature male hermit warbler, a rare bird in central coastal California. Hundreds of phlaropes dotted Tomales Bay; one which obligingly came in very close was a northern. After lunch the group motored to Point Reyes. En route several large flocks of male red-winged blackbirds were seen which had both red and buff on the wing, so were not the bicolored subspecies commonly found in the Bay area. Since we had no permit we were not allowed to take the trail down below the lighthouse and few birds were identified. Finally a part of the group visited Bolinas Bay in the late afternoon as the tide was going out.

Seventy-three species were identified, as follows: eared, western and pied-billed grebes; double-crested, Brandt and pelagic (Baird) cormorants; great blue heron; Am. and snowy egrets; black-crowned night heron; pintail, surf scoter, ruddy duck, Am. merganser, turkey vulture; sharp-shinned, red-tailed and marsh hawks; peregrine falcon (duck hawk), sparrow hawk, Calif. quail, coot, killdeer, black-bellied plover, long-billed curlew, willet, greater yellow-legs, least sandpiper, sanderling, northern phalarope; glaucous-winged, western, Calif., ring-billed and Heermann gulls; common tern, least tern (Herbert Wong), band-tailed pigeon, belted kingfisher, red-shafted flicker, Calif. woodpecker, black phoebe; Steller and scrub jays; raven, crow, chestnut-backed chickadee, bush-tit, red-breasted nuthatch, wren-tit; winter, Bewick and long-billed marsh wrens; hermit thrush, western bluebird, ruby-crowned kinglet, cedar waxwing, loggerhead shrike; Audubon and hermit warblers; house sparrow, western meadowlark; red-winged and Brewer blackbirds; house finch, pine siskin; Am. and lesser goldfinches; spotted and brown towhees; Oregon junco; white-crowned and song sparrows.

— A. Laurence Curl, *Leader and Historian.*

SAN FRANCISCO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The San Francisco Count will be held on Sunday, December 27. The following leaders have accepted territories as follows: 1. The Marina, Edward A. Mayers; 2. Bayshore and McLaren Park, A. Laurence Curl; 3. Lands End and Lincoln Park, Harold G. Peterson; 4. Golden Gate Park, 30th Ave. to Beach, Albert Boles; 5. Golden Gate Park, 10th Ave. to 30th Ave., Junea W. Kelly; 6. Golden Gate Park, 10th Ave. to Panhandle, also Buena Vista Park, Carl H. Fox; 7. Lake Merced and Fleishhacker Zoo area, Harry C. Adamson; 8. Twin Peaks, Stern Grove, City College, Carl L. Carson; 9. Seal Rocks and Pacific Ocean Beach, Sandy Sprunt; 10. Presidio, Bert Harwell; 11. San Francisco Wharves and Bay, Russell H. Pray; 12. Treasure and Goat Islands, L. R. Leinbach; 13. Small City Parks, Robert R. Chase. It is suggested that members contact the group leaders for meeting time and place, or chairman Arthur H. Myer, BE. 7-3080. Low tide will be at 11:22 a.m. and high tide at 4:41 p.m. It is expected that more members will assist in putting over the best count ever this year.

— Arthur H. Myer, *Chairman.*

DECEMBER MEETING

The 435th meeting of the Golden Gate Audubon Society will be held on December 10 in the West Auditorium of the Oakland Public Library, Oak and 14th Streets, at 7:30 p.m. Following the business meeting, Dr. Albert Boles will report on the Annual Convention of the National Audubon Society in New York. Then Dr. T. Eric Reynolds will speak on "The Genealogy of the Chicken". No-host dinner at Zerikote's by Lake Merritt at six o'clock.

— DOROTHY DEAN SCOTT, *Program Chairman.*

DECEMBER TRIP TO MARIN LAKES

On Sunday, December 13, to Ross and the Marin Lakes. Meet at the fire station in Ross at 9:00 a.m. From San Francisco take Greyhound bus at 7th and Mission, allowing an hour for the trip (check bus schedule in advance). Birding first at Ross where evening grosbeaks were seen several times last year, then proceed to Phoenix Lake. The more energetic may visit Lake Lagunitas and Bon Tempe Lake. These lakes are good places to find fresh-water loving ducks such as the ring-necked, also the hooded and American mergansers. Bring lunch, binoculars, telescope, and interested friends.

— A. LAURENCE CURL, *Acting Field Trips Chairman.*

OAKLAND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The East Bay Bird Count will be held on Sunday, January 3. The areas to be covered inclde: 1. Cascade Lake, San Pablo Reservoir, Bear Creek Road; 2. Lafayette, St. Mary's College, Moraga; 3. San Leandro Reservoir, Redwood Regional Park; 4. Alameda and Bay Farm Island; 5. Bay shore, Bay Bridge to Point Isabel; 6. North Berkeley Parks; 10. Lake Temescal, Garber Park; 11. Mills College and Leona Canyon; 12. Dimond Canyon and Mountain View Cemetary; 13. Joaquin Miller and Sequoia Parks, Skyline Blvd. Suggestions for other areas to be covered within our 15-mile circle will be welcomed. Those who operate feeding stations or who see unusual birds in their yards on this date are urged to send in their lists. Leaders have not yet been assigned to all areas, for further information call or write the General Chairman, A. Laurence Curl, LA. 6-7004, 751 Balra Drive, El Cerrito. Let's have more participants this year!

Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc.
Established January 25, 1917
For the Study and the Protection of Birds
Branch of National Audubon Society
California Office — 693 Sutter Street, San Francisco 2 — PR. 5-4042

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Monthly meetings second Thursday, 7:30 p. m.
Joint Membership, Local & National $5.00 per Year, includes Audubon Magazine
Local Membership only, $1.50 per year